

## FROM FORT ROYAL.

**Operations near Fort Pulaski—Skirmish at Venus Point—Forcible Position of Affairs—The African Question.**

From Our Special Correspondent.

FORT ROYAL, Feb. 18, 1862.

The battery on Venus Point, without the aid of the gunboats in the river, proved to be unexpeditiously effective in interrupting communication between Savannah and Fort Pulaski. On Saturday afternoon, Feb. 15, the rebel steamer *Iola*, which lay at Pulaski, endeavored to return to Savannah, and Tattau came down from the city with four vessels to convey or cover her passage. The guns from the battery, now christened Fort Vulcan, opened about three o'clock, and after a sharp engagement of nearly an hour, the *Iola* was compelled to return to Pulaski, while Tattau's flagship, the *Savannah*, was disabled and towed out of action by two of the other steamers, the remainder retiring in company. The gunboats Western World and E. B. Hale, which lay in Mud River, shared in the action, covered the flank of the battery, and assisted Tattau's retreat. On Sunday morning the *Iola* tried it again without help, but again was forced to return to Pulaski. The next day, taking advantage of an unusually high spring tide, she succeeded in getting through Oyster Creek, usually unnavigable, into Wilmington Narrows, and passing the pines in some mysterious way, finally reached Savannah.

No one was hurt in the battery in either engagement. Its guns were served by Capt. Gould's Company of the 3d Rhode Island, now an artillery regiment. The precision and effectiveness of the fire were extremely creditable to the artillerists, who have had slender opportunities for practice. Unless the rebel fleet is strongly re-enforced the blockade of the river may be considered established. Mud River, which offers an approach to the battery on its flank, is conveniently obstructed, and the two gunboats above mentioned remain to protect it. The rest of the fleet has returned to Fort Royal Harbor. In sounding the entrance through Wright's River, five torpedoes were found, sunk in the channel in order to destroy the squadron on its entrance. This amiable purpose was disappointed by the premature discovery, and, in order to test the efficiency of the contrivance, one of them was discharged at a safe distance by a musket-shot, and exploded with force enough to have injured a ship in favorable circumstances.

The night after the battery was erected, a large raft of timber came down the river and anchored itself on the point. It was in three parts, each forty feet long by twenty-five logs in width, and came at the most convenient time, when lumber was greatly wanted for all purposes, and could not be had. The submarine portion of the telegraph between Savannah and Pulaski has been severed, and a large quantity of the wire carried off. A broad lane was cut in the tall marsh grass on Jones' Island to a bridge against fire, and then the grass on the side exposed to rebel approach was burnt, leaving a cover for our troops, and compelling the Rebels, if they attack, to advance over open and difficult ground. On the whole, the present position of affairs on the river is more favorable than could well have been hoped, after the failure of the naval force, under Commander John Rodgers, to accomplish its part of the plan. In a few days it may be still more so.

Gen. Gilmore, who has ably engineered the difficult work of establishing this battery on a distant point over almost impracticable ground, was recently raised from Captain to his present rank by Gen. Sherman. This appointment by the latter cannot legally confer the rank of Brigadier-General, but operates to require obedience to him as such in this command, and is the strongest possible recommendation to President Lincoln to bestow the promotion. Gen. Gilmore's professional ability is beyond question, and there is nothing in the appointment itself to critics, but the circumstances in which it is made are rather peculiar. Capt. Saxon is Chief Quartermaster on Gen. Sherman's staff, was a classmate of Gen. Gilmore, and his senior in rank in the regular army. The value of his services as Quartermaster cannot be rated too highly. He took charge of the expedition from the start, fitted it out in New-York, and had the responsible control of all preparations, chartering ships, and purchasing supplies, till it landed at Fort Royal, and down to the present time. His extraordinary energy, ability, and integrity, have made his department a model of administration, and supplied every facility for the success of the expedition. No duties have been more arduous, no responsibilities greater, no services more effective than his. Before this war, the Quartermaster-General of the Army had fewer men to provide for, and far less important posts, yet he had the rank of Brigadier, and a brilliant staff and numerous clerks to assist him. Capt. Saxon has all the while remained Captain, and his merits have a special claim to Gen. Sherman's recognition, because he retained him in his position as Quartermaster against his wish, declared that his services were indispensable, and after Gen. Meigs had once given him leave to accept the command of an offered regiment, the 22d Massachusetts, induced him to recall his permission. If circumstances required the appointment of Gen. Gilmore, Gen. Sherman's obligations to Capt. Saxon, and his regard for the etiquette of the service, should have led him to confer an equal honor on the latter.

Professionals sensibility on such a point is extremely keen, and though Capt. Saxon would sacrifice no public interest to private feeling, he ought not to be expected to be wholly insensible to the neglect both here and at Washington, and the loss of opportunity for higher service. His ability as field-officer is well known in the army, and aside from other considerations, it is the worst policy at this hour to waste military capacity and accomplishments in routine duties. It is easier to find or insure many Quartermasters than one General. Capt. Saxon ought long since to have been at the head of a brigade.

I find in THE TRIBUNE of February 7 a letter from Boston, dated January 30, professing to state the substance of letters received from "Fort Royal, Beaufort, &c," which are said to "suggest a great deal that is gloomy and discouraging." Corrections of most of its errors may be found in the letters I send by the Baltic, which must have been already printed in THE TRIBUNE, but they are so serious as to deserve specific notice and consideration.

Gen. Sherman has repeatedly said to me that he had

all the means in the power to summon the negroes into camp; and I have repeatedly observed that he has steadily neglected the most certain and important, viz.: his police, authoritative measure of their freedom on arriving within the lines. It is not enough to reply that they are practically free when once here. In the first place, the evidence of it is not sufficiently clear and unquestionable to satisfy all the doubts of a nature inevitably distinguishable from life-long oppression. In the second place, it is low, how could we presume that such a convention would be communicated to and shared by the negroes remaining on the plantations? It being in the power of Gen. Sherman to declare the emancipation at least of those who trust themselves to the American flag, the negro has a right to say that so long as he remains to accomplish his purpose, he has no title to the confidence of the slave. An old and very ingenious general said the other day to his superintendents, that he knew well enough that he and all the others in camp were free, "but they don't know it, massa." Still more suggestive was the question of a newly-arrived plantation hand from the main, who, when he passes from the custody of the Boston Abolition to the care of Mr. Lee, looks him steadily in the face and asks him, "Now, Sir, will you tell me I am FREE?"

It is true that Gen. Sherman, in a letter to the War Department, in answer to Mr. French, and by two General Orders, has previously recognized the freedom of all slaves within his present jurisdiction, but these are not documents of which either the negro can be expected to take notice, or of which he can be made any knowledge.

The gloom of this writer, however, "arises from the whole method which the Government has adopted

toward these only loyalists of that region." To which the sufficient answer is, that Government has adopted no method whatever; and that very reasonably have been made a cause of complaint. Incredible as it may seem, it is the simple truth that, concerning this whole question of the relations between the military and naval authorities and the negroes, not one line of instruction or suggestion has been sent by the Government, or any department or officer of the Government, to either the military or naval commanders since the sailing of the expedition. Their discretion has been, like their authority, absolute. For what has been done, therefore, or left undone, the credit or blame must rest chiefly on Gen. Sherman, whose jurisdiction extends over all the land in Union occupation. Some islands have been, so far as occupied at all, under naval authority from want of troops to garrison them. Botany Bay Island, at North Edisto, is a case in point. The negroes gathered in great numbers under the guns of the Seawanhaka, and succeeded in hourly acts of fraudulent oppression. The manner in which portion of this Northern army allows itself to speak and act toward the negroes with whom it is brought in contact is a disgrace to the civilization which it assumes to represent and defend.

The negroes, especially strong in inferior specimens of the former, show a disposition to impose on them the most disagreeable tasks. The presence of Mr. Lee or one of his assistants will generally insure their more reasonable usage. For instance, in the work of pumping out an old ship near the dock, and discharging her freight of stone, a detail of soldiers and another of negroes were sent down to assist. When the negroes arrived, the soldiers stopped work on the pumps, and left them to the blacks, with the usual remark that "it was just the work for——negroes." Mr. Simpson, who was in charge of them, made no objection, and they pumped away steadily all the morning. After noon came, and a melody must go down into the hold also, half filled with sand and stones, to clear it out. The soldiers were now very ready to pump, and thought that clearing the hold was "just the work for negroes," but Mr. Simpson said "No, pumping was just the work for negroes in the morning, and it's just the work for negroes in the afternoon also." So the soldiers were ordered into the hold, and the negroes stood on deck and worked comfortably in the open air. But if Mr. Simpson had not been with them, the soldiers would have had their own way.

As to the wholesale appropriation by the army of the corn on the plantations for forage, I find that the explanation in my last letter is not sufficient. Gen. Sherman says that while the last two months he has given the most stringent orders against taking the corn from any plantations whatever, and that all such acts are in direct violation of his order and shall be inquired into. No guards were stationed however to ensure protection to this property, or to the negroes from the lawless visits of soidiens. I am reluctant to write on this latter subject in detail, and regret that I am obliged to refer to it at all. Every one knows what we will be made of such statements, but I do not think they ought to be wholly restrained. If no military authority can be invested to prevent such abuses, I see no other remedy than to give facts, dates and names. If anybody thinks it a creditable business to insult and oppress a quiet liberated slave, whose services he uses, and whose future character and capacity largely depend on his discretion and humanity, it is just to award him the full benefit of a public disclosure. The difficulty in both these cases is that sufficient pains are not taken to inquire into the condition of affairs in camp and on the plantations, and then to apply the remedy.

What is to be charged therefore on the Government is that until very lately it showed no interest

in this subject, cared only for cotton, failed to recognize and provide for the pressing wants of the ten thousand blacks suddenly placed under its guardianship, and left the whole question to be settled according to the discretion of the Commanding General. He is responsible for the failure to announce his policy, delay in the adoption of a system of care and superintendence, and negligence in the protection of those in his charge.

On the other hand the Government has begun to

recognize its responsibility, and has sent an agent

to gather information on which a right system may be based.

Gen. Sherman has meanwhile issued orders practically beneficial in their operation, though he shrinks from the frank utterance which would give a glad assurance of their liberators to those whose fetters are yet unbroken. His orders and the numerous letters of which copies have been sent, are the best evidence of his real interest in the subject, and his regard for the negroes whose fate is in his hands. Questions of emancipating and arming the black race are left untouched. These explanations, suggested by the letter above communicated on, refer only to those negroes now within the limits of military and naval command. Writing on board a steamer expected momently to get under weigh, I have no time to make an exhaustive or even a careful statement on the whole subject, but, so far as it goes, what I have written is correct.

CONFEDERATE CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION

From The Richmond Dispatch, Feb. 19.

Yesterday, long before the hour arrived, a large crowd had assembled at the Capitol to witness the inauguration of the permanent Government of the Confederate States, in the convocation and organization of the new Congress.

The Vice-President, under the authority of the Constitution, formally opened the session of the Senate. He called the attention of Senators to the resolutions passed by the Provisional Congress, and caused the temporary clerk to read the last clause of the permanent Constitution; also the act of permanent Government of the Confederate States, and the supplemental to the same.

The roll being called, the following Senators

answered to their names:

Mr. Seward, Mr. Seddon and Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Foote, Mr. Howell and Mr. Baker.

Mr. Phillips, Mr. Slidell,

Mr. Davis, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Foote, Mr. P. M. T. Day, Mr. Taylor,

Mr. Foote, Mr. Howell and Mr. Baker.

Mr. Foote, Mr. Seward and Mr. Preston.

Mr. Foote, Mr. Seward and Mr. Preston.